DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 105 755 FL 006 835

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TITLE Language and Politics in Guam and Micronesia.
PUB DATE Jul 74
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at the TESOL Conference (Los Angeles, California, March 9, 1975); Best Copy Available

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC Not Available from EDRS. PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *English; *English (Second Language); *Language Planning; *Official Languages; Political Influences; Political Issues; *Politics; Sociolinguistics
IDENTIFIERS Guam; *Micronesia

ABSTRACT

There is presently little world-wide interest in Micronesia. Attitudes toward the U.S. administration vary from the pro-American bid for Commonwealth status by the Marianas to the movement for independence in the Marshalls. The polarization of these attitudes from the northernmost to southernmost reaches of the territory seems to be in direct relation to the extent and intensity of the exposure to an American-English language environment in the various areas. In spite of a 200-year background of Spanish influence on Guam, the dynamic shift in one generation from Chamorro to English as a mother tongue, together with an almost jingoistic U.S. patriotism, exemplifies the significant effect of seven decades of exposure to English, especially through American television. In Micronesia, English has been the official language for only the last three decades, with the result that there is a much stronger persistence of native cultural patterns and a greater reliance on the local vernaculars, with a more critical attitude toward the U.S., especially among college students, than there is in Guam. These pro and con attitudes toward the U.S. and its culture have not been planned. Language engineering has, unfortunately, never been used to unify Guam and the Trust Territory of the Pacific islands into a social, economic, and political entity. (Author/PCT-PMP)

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LANGUAGE AND POLITICS IN GUAM AND MICRONESIA

Although few mainlanders, either American, Australian or Asian know or care much about Guam or Micronesia, those working and living in the West or Southwest Pacific are aware of the social, economic and political disquiet in the area, as Micronesia, the US Trust Territory of the Pacific, prepares for its constitutional convention and attempts to work out its future political status. Many Micronesians express sharp dissatisfaction with the US administration, accusing it of cultural imperialism, pointing to Guam with its high crime rate, its polluted beaches, its clogged roads and its arsenal of munitions as an example of what is in store for their own islands under continued American influence. On the other hand, Guam, with all its defects, exhibits a strong pro-American sentiment in spite of a small "Brown Power" movement which persists as an undercurrent, flowing against the overwhelming tide of patriotism and inter-cultural affability. The nearby Marianas, culturally tied to Guam, and destined, according to "reliable sources," to house the redeployment of military

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forces from forward positions in Asia, reflect the same cooperative spirit and comprise the only part of Micronesia opting for US Commonwealth status. In return, the US government, more specifically the Department of Defense, has a strategic interest in all the islands and wants to retain them as a safeguard against possible deterioration in relations with what has been know as the Far East but has now become the Near West.

How much of the cooperative attitude on Guam, itself, can be attributed to the seduction of the prevailing American way of life and how much is the result of the Organic Act of 1950, which conferred citizenship on all Guamanians, is a point of considerable socio-political interest. However, the history of colonialism suggests that, whatever the reason for any developing region's choice of a national model or affiliation, one of the most important vehicles for persuasion is language. Without a common tongue, communication of ideology is impossible. All the imperial powers have been intent on promoting their national language in the areas under their jurisdiction, recognizing it as a uniquely unifying force in social and political life.[1] Through learning the language of the ruling country, the subject population becomes first bilingual and bicultural, then, through the prestige of the

dominant group, later generations are gradually absorbed by or assimilated into the colonizing state. Although somewhat over-simplified, and not always successful, with many backlashes in our own time, this has been the pattern generally followed by both European and Asian colonial efforts.

In the case of Micronesia, one of the last mandated regions left in the world, the US, as trustee, has been much less concerned about the political effect of language than about its purely instrumental usefulness for administrative purposes. English is, and has been since 1945, the official language and the language of instruction in the schools, at least beyond the primary level. The administering authority had no choice in the matter. A language of wider communication was, and is, obviously essential to the orderly governing of more than 2000 islands spread out over a multilingual/multicultural area as big as the US mainland. Such a widely dispersed population, with extremely poor physical means of inter-island communication and with nine major vernaculars, is bound to present a serious administrative problem in any event.[2] None of the local spoken languages which still lack a standardized written form could possibly do the job, even if enough Americans could have been found who were willing to learn any one of them.

In the following pages, we shall look at some aspects of the language problem on Guam and in Micronesia and the importance of the lingua franca, English, in shaping the political future of these islands in the Western Pacific.

Language and Dialect on Guam

Chamorro, the language of the original inhabitants of Guam and the neighboring Marianas, is, like the vernaculars of Micronesia, a spoken tongue. Few attempts to develop a written form were made before the nineteenth century except those undertaken by missionaries who used the Roman alphabet for Bible translation.[3] To date there is no literature, in the sense of "belles lettres," in Chamorro. Without a standard written form, or a formal literature to enshrine it, the language has been subject to so much and such rapid change that relatively little of what might be styled "pure" Chamorro remains in the vocabulary. Remnants of its non-European origins are, nevertheless, retained in its structure. The prevailing influence on modern Chamorro is, of course, Spanish, a result of the more than 200 years (1658-1898) of domination by that country. Since America annexed Guam at the end of the nineteenth century, numerous English "loan" words have crept in and even a few Japanese terms were added during the brief Japanese occupation from 1941 to 1944. But characteristic syntactical

patterns, a basic preference for the passive voice, lack of pronoun gender and peculiarities of number and tense formation mark the Pacific culture imprint.

Although English has been the official language since the turn of the century, Guamanians have continued to speak Chamorro as a mother-tongue until a few years ago when the younger parents, who were themselves post-war babies, seem to have decided that they would rear their children in what they saw as the language of the future - English. However, their determination to give their children a new mother-tongue, well motivated though it undoubtedly was, caused their off-spring to speak a kind of Guamanian-English dialect which "stateside" elementary school teachers refer to as "broken English." Many of the parents of this era, orginally mother-tongue speakers of Chamorro themselves, had a poor command of spoken English. They inevitably passed this on to their children. Chamorro, which in their childhood had experienced a sharp revival after its suppression under the Japanese, was their vernacular. They had learned English in school as a second - really as a foreign - language, in a time when modern, applied linguistic, second-language methodology had not yet penetrated the American Western Pacific outposts. In spite of the fact that they spoke English haltingly and recognized their own deficiencies in the

language, they were determined that their children should not suffer the academic disadvantages that had been theirs when they had their own schooling in English, a language they seldom heard outside the classroom. These parents spoke to their pre-schoolers in the only English they knew - Guamanian English: American words appliqued on Chamorro syntax. From this initiation, the youngsters have created their own language, Guamanian Dialect English, (GDE), a melange of elements from both English and Chamorro.

In this context, the difference between a second dialect and a second language is a socially and politically significant one. Most Guamanian children of Chamorro parentage, entering primary school in the seventies have GDE as their first language.[4] Even though Chamorro was the mother-tongue of their parents, who had English as a second language, the children have been exposed constantly to English at home, via TV and radio. They identify more with the characters in "The Electric Company"[5] than with any heroic figures in their own folk lore. They think American. The adolescents, having had more time to pick up Chamorro, use it in speaking to each other as their private, teen-age language rather than as a means of cultural identification. Their values and desires - for jeans, beauty-contest laurels, motor bikes and plug-in guitars - are shaped as much by Hollywood

and network advertising as those of any youngster in Chicago or Des Moines. They are Westernized. If they aspire to go to college, their first choice is a mainland US campus, their second Hawaii, their last Guam. Many of them join the military services, and ROTC flourishes in the high schools. Their total behavior, their choice of life style, reveal the much greater influence of their American-English language environment than that of their Chamorro heritage. They are clearly de-tribalized and their "Western" perception of reality as well as their unconscious acceptance of American social and political institutions is facilitated by their cross-cultural English language school and media experience.

Language and Education in Micronesia

Meanwhile Micronesia - its people wards, not citizens, of the US, with a much shorter (only three decades, vs the seven decades for Guam) exposure to English as an official languge - has languished with a less developed public education system, fewer imported English-speaking teachers and, of necessity, more schooling in the vernacular. The most recent UN Mission observed:

> The standard of spoken and written English, especially in the elementary schools, is still low and, in fact, most of the instruction is carried out in the vernacular, even beyond the fourth grade where, in theory, English should be the medium of instruction.6

No wonder, then, that even now so few Micronesians are able to complete college or survive the necessary training to prepare them for leadership roles in their own society. Their previous political fortune, or misfortune, as prey to a succession of foreign powers has given them a mottled language history and shaped the political conservatism of the older segment of the population that continues to look to its traditional local chieftans as leaders.

In contrast to Guam, with its single language background, Micronesia speaks in many tongues and needs, even more, one language to tie it together. Carl Heine, one of Micronesia's most able commentators on the territory's political problems, has this to say:

> The fact that the English language is the only national vehicle of political unity in Micronesia, because it is used by the leaders, is little understood nor fully appreciated. It is disturbing that the language that is responsible for unifying the people of Micronesia is spoken by but a small proportion of the population. [7]

In the period of relative independence for Micronesia which lasted until the mid-seventeenth century,[8] education in the islands was an informal, tribal transmission of essential learning from one generation to the next. In addition to this "natural" native tutelage, religious instruction was begun by

missionaries under both the Spanish (1521-1899) and German (1899-1914) regimes. Their contribution included the teaching of reading and writing in the Roman alphabet and the production of a written form for several of the vernaculars so that the Bible might be translated into them. These efforts were directed more toward ecclesiastical than pedagogical or political goals.

Not until the Japanese occupation (1914-1945) was a public school system with a specific social/political goal widely introduced. The aim of this system was to provide a supply of general laborers and domestic servants, imperial colonial subjects, "who understood the Japanese language."[9] In spite of the fact that over half the school day was devoted to learning Japanese, only a few Micronesians acquired literacy in Japanese.[10] The foreign mission schools that were allowed to continue during this period, were less intent in their Japanization program so that a vestige of European language influence endured more or less underground.[11]

The advent of the Americans in 1945 saw the introduction of English-as-a-second-language in the third or fourth year of primary school. By 1948 an observer noted that English was already replacing Japanese as the lingua franca of the islands.[12]

From 1945 to 1961, under the American naval administration, both Guam and Micronesia were closed to the non-military so that 1949 school policy "preferred" local teachers who had learned English in mission schools. Nevertheless, district teacher-training schools, "to educate natives in basic English," were staffed by Americans.[13] Even with introduction of more "statesiders" as teachers, after 1961 (including more than 500 Peace Corps Volunteers in the late sixties), and the use of English as the language of instruction in all subjects, Trust Territory students still suffered major disadvantages in their attempt to acquire a language of wider communication. Their isolation from the mainstream of American life (TV has not yet been brought to the Trust Territory) inhibited the cross-cultural experience so necessary for functional bilingualism.[14] The fact that they seldom heard English outside the classroom made it, for them, a "foreign" rather than a second language. Lack of any scholarship tradition, or the literature which accompanies it, interfered with their appreciation and respect for learning, in general, and the literacy required to attain it.

The resulting pattern of academic failure has done little to contribute to better relations between "statesiders" and the indigenous population. It has served, in some cases, to lower the Micronesians' self-appraisal to the point where they

react with "Why do the Americans hate us so?" - and the longer they survive in the school system, the greater their resentment seems to be. As has been the case in emerging societies everywhere, the most articulate Trust Territory group, the university students, are the most hostile critics of administrative policy. At the most recent (1973) visit of the UN Trusteeship Council mission to the University of Guam, the Micronesian students had no hesitation in voicing their antagonisms to the US.

Language Planning

Such a posture is, to a great extent, the result of Washington officialdom's neglect. It may be only fair to add that this neglect has not been of MIcronesia itself, although that too has been argued,[15] but of the opportunity for promoting the language of wider communication as a vehicle for interisland (intercultural) understanding and for politcal unification, or what sociolinguistics calls "language engineering." There is certainly some historical irony to be found in the fact that the US in the World War I period, before it had any administrative responsibility for these islands, worried so much about the communication threat to them, particularly to Yap where the cables to China, South-est Asia and Australia crossed,[16] whereas, more recently, as trustee, it chose to disregard the

much greater political importance of stressing English as the means for island intercommunication and the unification of the territory's polyglot peoples. But such has been the case. Government concern with overall language planning has been notably absent since the US took over jurisdiction of these Pacific Islands. Instead, it has followed the "cultivation approach," wherein language problems are handled in a somewhat casual fashion by various private and public agencies without any coordinating body or plan.[17] The need for English has often been slighted for the sentimental function of the vernacular. The practice of minimum disturbance seems to have prevailed. "Till recently, the concept of Micronesia as a zoo or museum flourished..."[18] Evidently, not wanting to seem repressive, and regretting the colonial pattern it followed in the Philippines, or perhaps only wishing to reverse the autocratic manner of the Japanese, the American administration has avoided establishing the necessary overall English-second-language policy for the islands.

This has probably been a sin of omission rather than of commission and the responsibility for the negligence should be laid on Washington's doorstep rather than on the local administration's. There has always been too much to do with the limited budget allowed by an unconcerned Congress generally

indifferent to all unfranchised minority groups and especially to this small, distant and powerless Pacific miscellany.

For lack of funds, salient components of improved communication in Micronesia have been disregarded. In that very field in which it is technologically most advanced, the US has failed to be future-oriented politically. It has failed to appreciate the enormous potential of English, with its supraethnic character, to ease internal communication and thus create unity and stability in the area. It would have been relatively simple. There is no Micronesian identity to be threatened.

> Micronesia is a pluralistic society. There is no Micronesian language and, thus no person can be called a Micronesian by virtue of the language he speaks. Collectively and culturally, there is a Micronesian person whose identity may be either Yapese or Ponapean. But there is no Micronesian identity. If Micronesia is politically established as a country, there may emerge a new identity.19

In these island speech communities that have no alphabet of their own, there is no resistance to the Roman alphabet. It is associated with the Bible, the literature they know best.

Young Micronesians want to learn English. They have no antagonism to it. For them, it is the language of technology not the language of a single culture. They are aware that

Filipinos speak it as a mother tongue, as do Fijians and many other South Pacific islanders. It has great prestige. It is the language of government and of education. In this Christian region, it is also the language of religion. The Micronesian who has been educated recognizes, with Carl Heine, that

> Cultural and linguistic loyalties will present a problem in any future government. However, in view of the heterogeneity of culture and language, the future government of Micronesia will have to confine itself to the use of the English language as the official and common medium of communication throughout Micronesia.[20]

In view of the important social and political effect of English usuage and the aspirations of most young Micronesians to learn the language, it is regrettable that such little attention has been given to such specific and important matters as the development of basic English-second-language (ESL) texts for the schools,[21] and the recruitment of teachers with special training in Applied Linguistics or cross-cultural experience in language teaching. Until recently, almost no attempt has been made to prepare local teachers in the new methodology of second-language-learning.[22] To begin with, no survey of the status of English in the islands has ever been undertaken so that there is no real data on which to build an ESL program or policy.

In spite of numerous recommendations, made by various researchers, conferences and teams that came to study language policy, little has been done to implement them. As long ago as 1961, the distinguished linguist, Charles F. Hockett, in his report to the Director of Education in Micronesia, made specific reference to the need for coordinated ESL program supervision. He pointed out that the Department of Education should have a "Language Specialist" who visits the various districts and that this specialist should be supplemented by one for each district. Under "Administrative Considerations," Dr. Hockett had this comment: "The ultimate return (on money spent) is not monetary or economic, but friendship and good will, of enestimable importance in the world political scene."[23] Central planning, he concludes, "ought to be possible for all of American Micronesia."[24] Such advice has, unfortunately, gone unheeded.

The Stanford Research Instituto's Project Report, "Planning for Education and Manpower in Micronesia," dated December, 1967, sets forth in its Conclusions a proposal that, if put into effect, would have undoubtedly lowered the drop-out rate which has been such a cause of disaffection for Micronesian college students. The Stanford Report advises:

> A Territorywide college preparatory school should be established that will offer a one-year program stressing English language and study skills. A principal benefit of the school will be to increase the probability that Micronesian scholarship holders planning to study abroad will succeed.[25]

The Trust Territory Report to the Secretary of the Interior for 1972 refers to the "several hundred" Peace Corps Volunteers working as English teachers in the islands. Of their achievements, it says: "The relative success of the English Language (TESL) program, linchpin of Micronesian unity, is the most striking example."[26] The Territory administration clearly expresses here its own awareness of the political importance of language but, without the necessary funding from Washington, could do little to follow the recommendations made by the various outside observers.

The doctoral dissertations on the subject of education in Micronesia, with no need to be impressive in reporting "achievements," are much more critical.[27] In referring to the TESL program on Ponape, the 1972 study condemns it: "This pedagogical process reinforces the indigenous imitative, rote style of learning..."[28] The writer also faults the lack of cross-cultural preparation of teachers and the resulting effects on the students who muddle along with an "inadequate

conceptual apparatus to accompany (their) new language skills."[29] In this connection, he mentions such things as the fact that Ponapeans see four colors in the rainbow while Americans see six, or the concept of a circle which, for us, is a flat continous line while, for Ponapeans, it includes a sphere and a cylinder.[30] If these concrete matters offer such potential for misunderstanding, imagine the problems presented by more abstract concepts—like equality, democracy, and freedom—involved in the political process.

Unfortunately, the opportunity to use this uniquely powerful instrumment of language to unify the diverse population of Micronesia has almost passed. Attitudes toward America have taken shape and those that are already antagonistic will be difficult to change.[31] Although language is not specifically mentioned, the Pacific Daily News editorial for July 7, 1974. "Micronesian Unity - A Fragile Concept," sums up the present situation fairly well. Commenting on the existing disunity, it concludes:

> Things may have been done differently, if a long time ago, say ten years ago, the U.S. had decided that the islands would someday be independent, or a commonwealth tied to the U.S. and then worked in that direction with a strong program, including political education and a program of pulling the islands closer together through a strong communication and transportation system. This wasn't done,

> however. Instead, we decided to let them pretty much on their own, politically and, unfortunately, it may not work out. Moreover there doesn't seem to be any real way of going back, either. The sad part of all this seems to stem from a lack of a strong U.S. policy in the Pacific regarding the islands, a policy that would have been on-going and continous. The U.S./ because of this lack of a Pacific policy, will come in for criticism in the years ahead, at the way they botched up the Micronesians. This lack of policy was, in large part, created by differences of opinion between the Department of Defense, State, and Interior. We can sit back and blame the Micronesians for their split ups and lack of unity, but the United States government should have had the foresight to see what was going to happen. We didn't have that vision and we're certain that we'll come under increasing criticism for many years to come.

Washington is obviously as remote from Micronesia as London is from the West Indies, and the US Congress evidently has as little concern for its wards as the British Parliament had for its overseas territories in the Caribbean before they began to clamor for their independence. Yet English could have been - and perhaps can still be - the means for unifying all of Micronesia into a single economic and social unit, if not a political one, as affirmatively inclined toward the US as Guam is now.[32]

Monika Kehoe
Guam, July, 1974

[1] Joshua A. Fishman, et.al., Language Problems of Developing Nations, (New York, 1968), 3-13.

[2] Possibly the only comparable antecedent has been the British experience in the Caribbean.

[3] Dr. Donald Topping of the University of Hawaii has recently published a grammar of Chamorro and made important contributions toward regularizing its orthography. Attempts are also currently in progress to produce "readers" for use in the bilingual program on Guam and Rota.

[4] Unpublished report of the kindergarten survey made by the present writer under a grant from the Director of Research, University of Guam, Agana, 1972. Further research would likely establish that GDE has been the first language of many of the children born to Chamorro parents since 1965.

[5] A very popular children's TV program aired daily by the Public Broadcasting System.

[6] Report of the U.N. Visiting Mission to the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, 1973, 106.

[7] Carl Heine, Micronesia at the Crossroads, Hawaii, (1974), 110-1.

[8] The Spanish gave little attention to the instruction of the autocthonous population in the first century of European hegemony.

[9] J.L. Fisher, "The Japanese Schools for the Natives of Truk, Caroline Islands," Human Organization, XX, (1961), 84.

[10] Ibid.

11 Donald F. Smith, "Education of the Micronesian with Emphasis on the Historical Development," unpublished dissertation, Washington, D.C., The American University, (1968), 138.

12 Elizabeth Converse, "U.S. as Trustee," Far Eastern Survey, XVIII, (1948), 282.

13 Smith, "Education of the Micronesian," 40.

14 The principal contact that the outer islands (mainly atolls) have with "civilization" is the visit of the Trust Territory government field trip and supply ship on an irregular schedule three or four times a year. Other than this, they have a two-way radio which functions unpredictably at best.

15 In describing the Micronesians' reaction to the pace of American development programs, Heine remarks: "They came to realize that the United States policy of "gradualism" was, in reality, a policy of neglect." Micronesia at the Crossroads, 56.

16 Roy W. Curry, Woodrow Wilson and Far Eastern Policy, 1913-1921, 258. Earl S. Pomeroy, in Pacific Outpost: American Strategy in Guam and Micronesia, (1951) also quotes Governor E.J. Born of Guam who wrote in 1911: "The object of taking Guam from Spain was primarily to secure landing for the trans-Pacific cable then in contemplation."7.

17 Joan Rubin and B.H. Jernudd, Can Language Be Planned?, Hawaii, (1971).xiv.

18 Carl Heine, Micronesia at the Crossroads, 56.

19 Ibid. 49.

[20] Ibid. 70.

[21] The various districts have had to adapt materials such as those designed in New Zealand (by Tate) for Polynesian speakers of British English or the Fries American English Series, designed for Puerto Ricans.

[22] The Pacific Daily News of July 3, 1974 announced that a grant of $39,313 had been made available to the Trust Territory Department of Education to train Micronesian bilingual teachers. The PDN of July 26, 1974 headlines, "TT Language Grants Total $460,723," present a classic example of "too late" if not "too little."

[23] Charles F. Hockett, "Recommendations on Language Policy in the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands and in the Territory of Guam," unpublished, (April 16-17, 1961), 7.

[24] Ibid. 8.

[25] "Planning for Education and Manpower in Micronesia," Stanford Research Institute, SRI Project 6579, (1967), Conclusion # 16,4.

[26] Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands Report to the Secretary of the Interior, Saipan, (1972), 36, TESL is the acronym for "Teaching English as a second language."

[27] Smith, "Education of the Micronesian," and Nat Joseph Collelta, "American Schools for the Natives of Ponape," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1972.

[28] Collelta, "American Schools," 118.

[29] Ibid. 119.

[30] Ibid.

[31] It may be worth noting that the Mariana-Guam desire for closer affiliation with the U.S. represents that area in which the English language environment is strongest.

[32] It may also be worth noting, as I have previously indicated (see my article, "The English Language Imperative for Guam and Micronesia" which appeared in December, 1972 in KIVUNG, the journal of the Australasian Linguistic Society published by the University of Papua and New Guinea in Boroko, TPNG.) that

> If the Micronesians are to enjoy communication with their fellow islanders in Oceania and the extended facilities for information and entertainment afforded by the mass media, they will need to understand the language of its dissemination. By all counts, that will continue for some time to be English.